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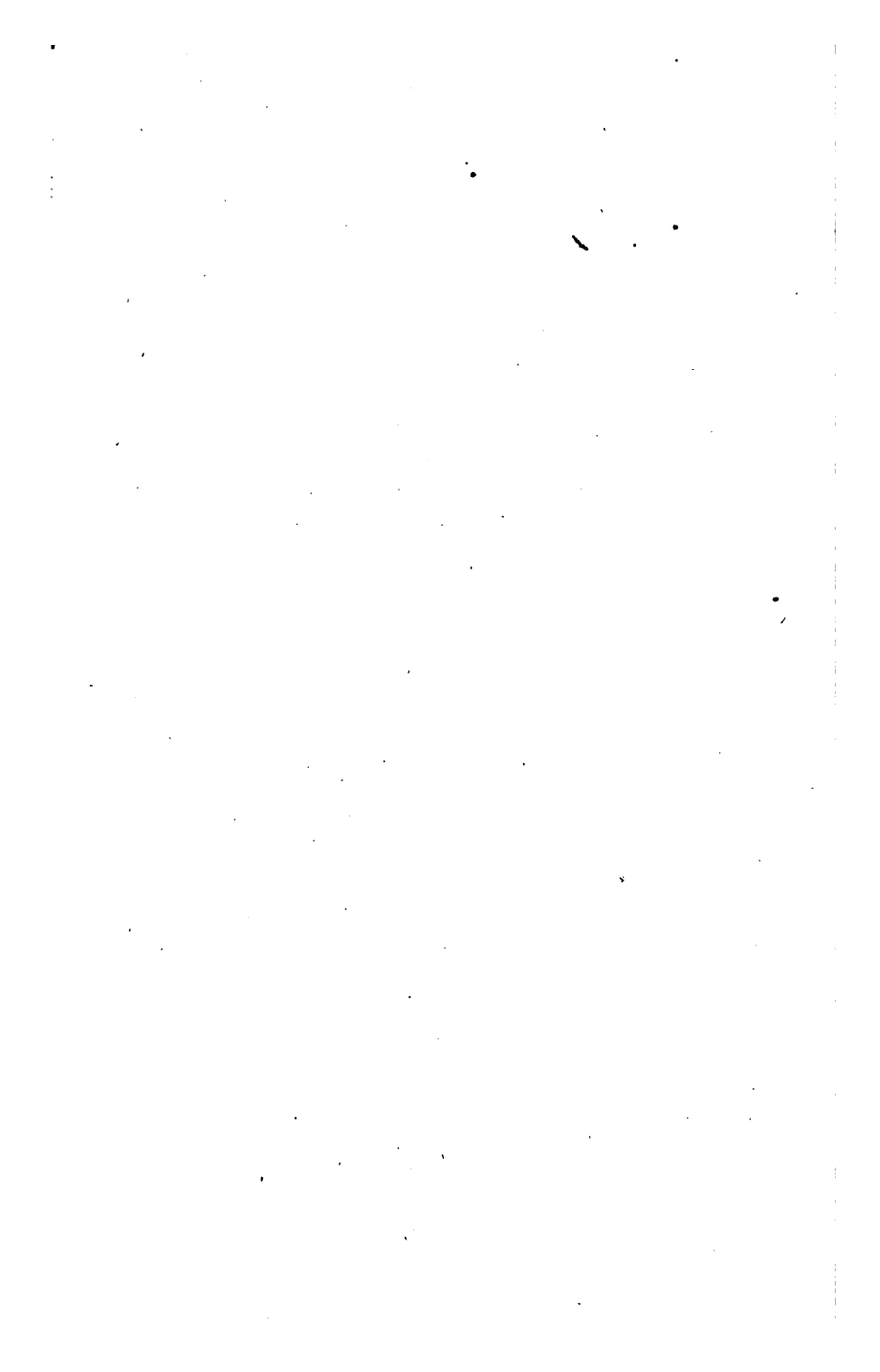
OBSTACLES
TO THE
GREATER SUCCESS
OF
COMMON SCHOOLS.

AN ADDRESS
DELIVERED BEFORE THE
AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF INSTRUCTION,

AT
PORTLAND, ME., AUGUST 30, 1844.

BY CHARLES NORTHEND,
Principal of the Aborn Street School, Salem.

BOSTON:
WILLIAM D. TICKNOR & CO.,
Corner of Washington and School Streets.
1844.



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OBSTACLES
TO THE
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MUCH has been said, within a few years, about the importance of our public schools,—and the necessity of elevating their character and increasing their means of usefulness, has been zealously, ably, and somewhat successfully urged upon the consideration of the community. The friends and advocates of popular education have not been backward in proposing plans for operation, some of which have been well worthy of attention, while others have been altogether *visionary, futile, or impracticable*. Conventions have been called, lectures have been published and circulated, and newspaper columns and periodicals of the day, have lent their aid, to some extent, in order to arouse the public mind to the great and noble

object of providing for the free and wide-spread means of general intelligence and morality. All these efforts have been well *in* and *of* themselves. But, as might have been anticipated, many possessing a wisdom not according to knowledge, have been *over-zealous*. With much freedom they have condemned all past proceedings, and with the utmost confidence proposed their own plans and theories as eminently calculated to effect the desired changes and improvements.

But while so many are thus prompt in *bringing forward*, with so much apparent interest, zeal and confidence, *new* theories, how few are really competent to carry *any* into successful operation? Many have yet to learn that *theory* is one thing and *practice* quite another. As well might we attempt to have the same model and size answer for vessels to navigate all our varying streams and waters with equal rapidity and safety as to make any uniform theory answer for all our schools. So long as circumstances, in themselves different, cause a diversity in the features and condition of schools, every teacher, in order to be successful, must have within himself the requisite skill and ability to vary his plans and adapt them to existing, unforeseen and immediate wants.

That our free school system will admit of many and great improvements is doubtless true; but that every thing *is* or *has been* wrong, I do not believe. The good qualities of any institution or system should be commended and fostered, while efforts are made to *discover*, *point out* and *remove* bad ones. The free school system of New England should be the pride of every good citizen, and for its unobstructed and perfect operation should he ever be willing to labor. Other systems, for other countries

and circumstances, may possess merit which would cease to exist under our own institutions. We must judge of the worth and usefulness of a system from the nature, extent and importance of its results ; and where, I would ask, shall we find more of general intelligence, morality, spirit of enterprise or qualification for active business, than exists within New England, and under the influence of her excellent system of popular education ? In view of such results we should be slow to neglect or condemn a system,—but we should rather labor to secure its more efficient and extensive operation.

I propose, on the present occasion, to consider “ **SOME OF THE OBSTACLES TO THE SUCCESS OF COMMON SCHOOLS,**” and to make some suggestions which have a bearing, directly or indirectly, upon the interests of these schools. My remarks will be made in reference to these institutions as they exist throughout the country ; and many of them may not be strictly applicable to our cities and large towns.

I. *The want of proper attention to the structure and location of school-houses,* is a serious obstacle to the best interests of schools.

So much, of late, has been said and done on this point, that it may be deemed entirely superfluous for me even to allude to it. To the well directed efforts of a few interested, zealous and influential men, the public is indebted for great and important changes, already wrought, in opinion and action ; and, as a “ little leaven leaveneth the whole lump,” so we may hope that the interest excited by their efforts will continue to increase and spread until our whole country shall be permanently benefitted. But while much *has been done*, it is true that much re-

mains *to be done*, and it best becomes us to express our approbation of the good already achieved, by uniting our efforts to carry on and complete the reform.

New England is yet disfigured, if not disgraced, by a multitude of witnesses of the want of skill and taste in the structure of school-houses; and nought, but the frequent and decided protest of those who feel the importance of the subject, can prevent the *perpetuated* existence of these witnesses in the shape of repaired and "patched up" school houses.

From an examination of some of these buildings, as they now exist, we might reasonably infer, that the design was to make them as *inconvenient, uncomfortable and unpleasant* as possible,—and, surely, if such *was* the design, it has been, in many places, most admirably executed. Can you not now call to mind some of the school-houses in which you spent many of your youthful hours? Can you not remember the dreary and barren location? the uncouth structure? the uncomfortable seats and desks? the crowded room? the foul and "pent up" atmosphere? the room so very cold in winter and so oppressively warm in summer? the rough and unpainted interior, with not even the "*whited outside?*" I say, can you not recal all these things, and does not the mere thought of those seats and desks almost *cause you to ache?*

But we have reason to rejoice that these miserable specimens of the "*knowledge boxes*" (we might more properly say *torture boxes*) which have so long been visible in our towns and villages, are rapidly disappearing, and if the present interest shall continue and extend, may not some Yankee realize a fortune, some fifty years hence, by attaching a horse to one of these preserved 10 by 12

"boxes" with its fixtures complete, and driving about the country for exhibition ! Certainly such a consummation may be most devoutly wished !

But there is another defect, more serious in its consequences than all others combined, and that is, *want of proper provision for ventilation*. On this point it is impossible to speak too freely or too frequently. Our school-houses are, often, crowded with children, whose healthful and energetic existence depends much upon the state of the atmosphere they breathe, with no means provided for removing the impure air, and supplying its place with fresh and pure, save such apertures as the hand of time, or the knife of some mischievous school-boy has made. It is computed, that in a school-room each pupil destroys the oxygen of about 1 gallon of air every minute. In a school of 50 scholars 3000 gallons would be rendered unfit for use every hour. And yet how few have ever thought of this, or provided for it when constructing school-houses. How many teachers, and how many pupils, have suffered and languished, and even died, from being compelled to spend so much time in an impure and deadened atmosphere ? It is unquestionably true that disease is frequently contracted, and the constitution irreparably injured, from this cause. To this, also, may be attributed most of the cases of headache, and those feelings of lassitude and prostration which often characterize a school ; and to the same source may be charged those indescribable, and otherwise unaccountable, cases of restlessness, and those instances of petulance and sensitiveness which are so contagious in their nature and so unpleasant in their effects. The evil consequences resulting from a want of suitable

ventilation, are neither sudden nor violent, but not the less actual, and often fatal.

Of the location of school-houses it is hardly necessary to speak. Every one, who has given any attention to the subject, knows, that, as a general thing, they are not located with any particular regard to pleasantness, or to the amusements, or convenience of pupils. They are either placed in some gloomy and retired spot, or so "hemmed in" by other buildings as almost wholly to exclude the sun's rays and the free circulation of pure air; or where the constant pounding of the neighboring workshops proves a serious interruption to the order and quiet of the school-room. If I was called upon for a definition of "school-house," and was obliged to depend upon the specimens furnished in many towns, as a basis, I should say "*a school-house*" is a building designed to contain the greatest possible number in a given space without any reference either to the comfort or convenience of the occupants, and placed on some spot good for nothing else.

Now where these things are thus, we cannot reasonably expect much from the schools. In other matters we act otherwise. We are not willing to have our churches constructed on the same principle. In these we are unwilling to spend two or three hours weekly, unless our seats are made comfortable with cushions and every desirable convenience, yet we are not at all disturbed at the thought of having our children confined six hours daily, balancing, as best they can, upon upright posts, or cramped up in narrow and uncomfortable seats,—breathing and re-breathing the same foul air, and when released from their miserable confinement, doomed to

see the same dull and gloomy aspect of the adjacent premises. And hence an education becomes associated with *pain, unpleasantness, gloominess*. But these things ought not so to be. A school-house should be constructed and located with peculiar regard to *comfort, convenience, and pleasantness*. The seats and desks should be as easy and as much adapted to the free and healthful position of the occupant as possible, and more than two should never sit at the same desk, and, if practicable, not more than one. Every part of the room should be finished with proper taste and neatness, and provision should be made to meet every reasonable want of the pupils. An expenditure of a few dollars for paint, will not only improve the appearance of the building, but, in point of economy, will be a profitable investment ;—for while a poorly finished and ill constructed house will almost *invite* the abuse of children, a good style of finish will be properly appreciated and preserved, and at the same time will tend to incite and foster a corresponding appearance of neatness in the persons and habits of the pupils.

As regards location, I would say, select one of nature's best, choicest spots, or as nearly so as circumstances will permit :—a spot, if possible, pleasing to the eye ; retired, though neither lonely nor dreary ; secluded, though not entirely shut out from the active world ; removed alike from the noisy workshop and the busy street. Let it be a spot to which the fresh and pure air, and the sun's enlivening rays may have proper access. Ample and pleasant playground, well supplied with ornamental trees, should belong to the building, and thus every apology be removed for trespassing on the adjoining lands. Such a

location, with a neat and properly constructed house, will tend to connect agreeable associations with learning,—and “*going to school*,” will be considered a delightful *privilege*, rather than a disagreeable *task*, as is now too often the case.

But I have already enlarged too much on this point, though it is a pre-requisite so essential to a pleasant, happy, and successful school, that I hardly knew how to say less. It is one of those subjects which must be so frequently presented as almost to become *repulsive* before merited attention will be given to it.

II. *The frequent employment of teachers who are incompetent to discharge the duties of the office and who feel no particular interest in the cause of instruction, is injurious to the best interests of the schools.*

In my remarks under this head, I shall have no reference to that large and highly respectable class who have engaged in teaching as a *profession*. Most of such manifest a spirit of devotion to their calling, and a perseverance, which cannot fail of crowning their labors with abundant success. But there are, and always have been, more *nominal* teachers than *real* ones. The inducements held out, as regards permanency of employment or reward of services, are not such as will engage the heart, the time, and the influence of men of talents and attainments of a high order. In no department, probably, is there so much need of sterling worth in every good qualification, and yet in no department is the premium awarded to real merit so paltry and inadequate. Hence, in nearly every community may be found men who are teachers from necessity, or misfortune, rather than from a true devotion to the business, proceeding from a

just conception of the important and responsible nature of incumbent duties. The profession of teaching has been a kind of "*city of refuge*" for those who have no abiding employment ; and who too often are unfit for any. Many have entered upon the duties, or I should rather say *trampled* upon the duties of the office and "kept school," influenced by no higher motives than a desire to obtain the stipulated compensation. But what they thus gain, their employers doubly lose; for however well such *mock* teachers may succeed in filling their own pockets, it is very certain that they accomplish nothing towards filling the heads and minds of the children with useful instruction. Such teachers not only bring a reproach upon the profession, but they greatly retard the progress of the schools in which they are engaged, and render the work of more worthy and competent successors vastly more difficult; for much of their time must be given to the removal of errors and the counteracting of wrong impressions formed under the influence of their predecessors. True economy would prompt to the payment of the individuals in question, not for instruction imparted, but for a pledge not to attempt to impart any.

In the selection of men to take the charge of business of any *other* nature, every precaution is taken to ascertain whether the candidate possesses the qualification and skill, requisite for the faithful and profitable discharge of the necessary duties. This we consider the part of wisdom. But in the employment of those who are to educate and train the youthful mind and fit the untutored and ignorant child of to-day, for the virtuous, intelligent and useful citizen of to-morrow, a far different course is pur-

sued, and, too often, is *cheapness* the only "*open Sesame*" to the office of teacher, regardless alike of real merit or of aptness to instruct or to discipline. The following case will, in some degree, illustrate a feeling too prevalent, in many places, even at the present enlightened day. "Stouber, the predecessor of Oberlin and pastor of Waldbach, on his arrival in the parish desired to visit the principal school. He was accordingly conducted into a miserable cottage where a number of children were crowded together without any apparent occupation. He inquired for the master. 'There he is,' said one, as soon as silence could be obtained, pointing to a withered old man, who lay on a little bed in one corner. 'Are you the schoolmaster, my good friend?' said Stouber. 'Yes, sir.' 'And what do you teach the children?' 'Nothing, sir.' 'Nothing! how is that?' 'Because,' replied the old man, 'I know nothing myself.' 'Why, then, were you appointed schoolmaster?' said Stouber. "Why, sir, I had been taking care of the Waldbach pigs for a great number of years, and when I got too old and infirm for that employment, they sent me here to take care of the children."

And is it not true, that men who are fitted for nothing else are frequently "*pensioned off*" with the charge of a school? And is it not equally true, that a teacher who has devoted his best years and wasted his energies in the untiring and faithful discharge of arduous duties, is cast aside as unfit for any other business, and left in old age, destitute, even, of the reward often bestowed upon a favorite horse or dog,—a life support in consideration of good services rendered in younger days!

III. *The inconsiderable appropriations made for the support of schools, and the manner of making them, in many towns*, attach to the cause of popular education a very undesirable insignificance. A call upon the inhabitants of some districts, "in town meeting assembled" for the purpose of providing for the public operations of the town, might lead one to suppose that *schools* were a sort of *public nuisance* to be abated by an abatement of expenditures in their behalf. The first thing done is to vote to raise a certain amount of money for public purposes. After this, very liberal appropriations are made for the support of good roads, for the wants of the Fire, Military and other companies, for the prosecution of legal difficulties, &c. &c.—and *last of all* the school department comes in for "*all unappropriated moneys.*" Such has been the case in many towns, and such is the case in some even now, though we have reason to rejoice that the number is annually growing less, and that many places have already assigned to the "school department" a deserved prominence. This is encouraging, certainly, and will result to the highest good of the schools,—while the opposite course, with appropriations grudgingly and penuriously made, will have a withering and degrading effect. Generous appropriations for schools *one* year will produce results so favorable and satisfactory as to secure still more hearty and liberal provisions for the *next*, as may be seen in the increased, and annually increasing appropriations of some towns.

IV. *The entire neglect, or the partial and injudicious performance of the duties of School Committees*, is often prejudicial to the prosperity of the schools under their charge.

The office of School Committee is no sinecure. Its duties are important and arduous ; its rewards,—pecuniary or honorary,—quite inconsiderable. The faithful and intelligent discharge of these duties, contributes much to the usefulness of the schools. It is not my intention, at this time, to consider or discuss their general nature and extent. In most instances they are much better performed, than appreciated by those for whose benefit they are discharged. My design is, merely to allude to a disposition, somewhat prevalent, to under-rate the schools and represent their condition as extremely deplorable. One would infer, from the remarks or reports of some who hold the office in question, that an ability to censure and find fault added much to the competency of the incumbents. If they visit a school, it is with more of the censorious spirit, than with a desire to commend and encourage,—and if they address the pupils, it is, frequently, in a manner calculated to impair all confidence in the teacher, and to weaken his influence and authority. I will not say that the schools are in a very flattering condition ;—I will even grant that they may be very defective. Will it tend to improve or elevate them, to decry them and represent them as unworthy of patronage ? Most certainly not. If a teacher fails from incompetency, or from want of interest, to meet reasonable wants, the sooner and more quietly his connection with the school ceases, the better will it be for all concerned. It is the first duty of a committee to become satisfied respecting the proper qualifications of teachers,—and a second and never-ceasing duty to sustain and encourage them while in their service. It is very rarely the case that public censure or decial will subserve any good purpose

so far as relates to school matters. If parents receive unfavorable impressions of a school they will not be disposed to patronize it.

If a teacher is deficient or negligent in some particulars he should receive proper hints and advice in a proper way, but it is not often necessary to administer reproof in presence of a school, nor can it be done without injurious effects. I would say, that a committee man should send his children—if he has any to send—to the school he superintends, and thus manifest in a decided way his confidence in its goodness and efficiency ; he should often visit the school, and manifest a lively and deep interest in promoting, in every suitable way, its general interests, and always be ready to sustain the teacher and defend him from attacks which are, often, so inconsiderately and so cruelly made. In so doing he will cheer and stimulate the teacher, and induce a feeling of confidence, that shall be productive of the happiest results.

V. *The disposition on the part of parents to send their children to school at too early an age*, I consider detrimental to the schools, and also to the children. Here I must not be understood to affirm, that children begin to *learn*, too soon, but, that they are, very frequently, subjected to the instruction and discipline of the school-room at too early a period of their existence. A child, who is scarcely able to speak some of the most common and simple words, has enough to learn, and enough whereon to exercise his opening mind, without being forced, with (to him) unmeaning sounds and dull monotony, to repeat his A, B, C, or to pronounce his a—b—ab. He has but just commenced his being in a world of novelties and

wonders, and which way soever he may turn his eye, he sees enough to exercise his tender mind and awaken thoughts ; and the words and names, which he hourly hears, are quite sufficient for him to retain. And, if, within the doors of the parental roof, he hears and sees enough to excite his curiosity and exercise his reflective powers, how much more does he meet with, that is new, interesting and wonderful, when he wanders "out of doors." As he gazes with childish delight upon the rattling carriages of the street, think you that the momentary glance leaves no impression on his mind, or awakens no thoughts or ideas before dormant ? As he walks into the fields and gardens, and with infant rapture beholds the charming flowers, the springing grass, the waving grain and stately trees, is his little mind inactive, or unaffected ? As he looks, with simple and natural wonder, upon the water, and, perchance, sees some noble ship moving majestically along, has not his young mind enough on which to feed and grow ? As he views, with pure amazement, and perhaps with terrific astonishment, a *puffing, whizzing, flying* train upon one of our railroads, think you his mind can remain torpid ? And when he raises his eyes to "heaven's blue vault," and views the golden orb of day, and the moon and countless stars, "those lesser lights that rule the night," have we not reason to apprehend danger from excess, rather than from deficiency of action ?

Who, that has taken some prattling child upon his knee and undertaken to answer his earnest and almost numberless questions, has not been, as it were, "struck dumb" by the artless and sincere manner in which his little friend will finally ask "where is God, and who made

Him ?" And can a child who is thus interested to learn respecting things which he sees, or about which he hears, and is at last left *to think, to conjecture, to wonder, who, what and where* the great first cause and grand sustainer of all things is, receive any better exercise for his expanding mind ? Should he, until his *wonder*, and *amazement* and *delight* and *curiosity* have in a measure subsided, or become gratified, be confined to the dull monotony, and, to him, unmeaning routine of a school-room ?

Let him be aided in his endeavors to understand all that he sees with inquiring interest ; let him be assisted, in a degree, to comprehend the meaning and use of the language he daily and hourly hears ; let an attempt be made to solve all his doubts and queries and wonders, and when he has acquired some familiarity with objects of every day observation, he may be prepared to learn the nature and use of letters.

Children who have been sent to school when quite young, and pressed onward, have become disgusted with exercises which they could not comprehend. They have learned to read before they were able to understand the *object* of reading, or the *meaning* of what they read. They have been incited on by the novelty of the exercise and by flattery, and as soon as these lose their influence,—as they certainly will,—they sink into a state of dislike or apathy, from which it is no easy matter to arouse them. But let a child's mind be well exercised by leading him to comprehend the meaning and use of every thing he observes around him, let his curiosity be properly cultivated, and he will soon be anxious *to read*, that he may, from books, derive new information and new delight. Instead of regarding his early lessons as dull

and useless, he will look upon them as *keys* which will unlock for him the "storehouse of knowledge," and explain to him the many mysteries and wonderful things about which he is constantly thinking ; in other words, he will commence learning with a definite and rational object in view.

VI. *The neglect of primary schools, or the want of suitable provision for instruction in them,* is a serious obstacle to the greater usefulness of our free school system. Until quite recently, these schools have been regarded almost in the light of necessary evils,—and in many places they are so regarded at the present time. But very little attention has been given to the qualifications of those to whom their charge has been committed, and for the very good reason, that no special qualifications have been deemed requisite. But they demand and merit better treatment, and of all schools they will suffer most from neglect.

That cultivator, who should neglect his plants and young trees while in the nursery, and assign as an excuse that they were soon to be transplanted and would then receive more attention, would be pronounced exceedingly unwise. While in the nursery, they should be watched and cultivated with the greatest care, that they may become fit subjects for transplantation. If allowed, in the nursery, from an overgrowth of weeds and thorns to become crooked and stunted, they will probably always continue so, or become ill-shaped and worthless trees. So it is with our primary schools. They are, as their name designates, of primary importance, and should be so regarded. Impressions which children here receive will "grow with their growth and strengthen with their

strength." How important, then, that these impressions be of the right kind, and that they be seasonably and properly made ! How important that these schools lay broad and deep and well, the foundations on which the higher schools are to erect the superstructure ! How much time and strength, that often, must, necessarily, be spent in *undoing* and *re-doing*, might be most pleasantly and profitably spent in extending and perfecting the good work, if properly commenced ! I would not speak disparagingly of the teachers of these schools. They have been in many cases much better than the public has required and so scantily rewarded. Under existing circumstances, I am more surprised at the amount they have accomplished, than at what they have left undone, or but imperfectly done. With deserved encouragement and suitable facilities, they will faithfully and efficiently act ^{on} ~~their~~ part. My only object, in thus briefly alluding to these schools, has been to bespeak for them the cordial support and fostering care of all who feel any interest in the cause of education. To these they are entitled, and with these properly and cheerfully bestowed, they will accomplish all that the most sanguine can expect ; but if they are withheld, or grudgingly rendered, they must continue, as in many cases they *have* continued, *necessary evils*, or places in which habits are formed which must be subsequently eradicated, or exist to mar the character through subsequent life.

VII. *The multiplicity of studies introduced and partially pursued*, is another obstacle to the greater usefulness of our schools. Our common schools should afford the means for thorough instruction in all those branches which are of indispensable importance to the man of business.

It is much better that a *few* of the more useful branches be *well understood*, than that a mere *smattering* of *many* be obtained. Yet there is in the community a very strong tendency on the part of parents, teachers and pupils, to attend to some of the higher studies, to the partial or absolute neglect of the more common and useful branches. This tendency should be counteracted. No scholar should be *encouraged* or *allowed* to omit, or lightly pass over the common branches of an English education, in order to devote time to the more ornamental, but less useful studies. Reading, Spelling, Writing, Arithmetic, Grammar and Geography, should not be made secondary, either to Chemistry, Astronomy, Botany, Geology, Zoology, Phrenology, or Animal Magnetism ! But how often are they thus regarded, and as such how sadly are they neglected ! An experienced and popular teacher once related the following case, which tends to confirm the statement we have just made.

Said he, "A young lady came to place herself under my instruction, with the intention of becoming a teacher. Upon examination, I found her exceedingly deficient in the common branches of an English education, but perceiving, from her appearance, that she had a course of study marked out in her own mind, I asked her what branches she wished to pursue while under my care. She replied, 'I wish to *study Chemistry, Philosophy, Astronomy, and French, paint a mourning piece, conjecture a map, and learn BIGOTRY.*'" Thinking that the last named sufficiently abounded without culture, the teacher very readily *conjectured* that there was a mistake in the nomenclature, and upon subsequent inquiry he was induced to substitute *Botany* for *Bigotry*. And thus it

is that *young ladies*, and *young gentlemen* too, sometimes attend to studies, with the mere names of which they are not familiar. If, instead of this, they would apply their minds and devote their time to the pursuit of more solid and really indispensable branches, and acquire *thorough* elementary knowledge, they would have a sure and valuable basis upon which to erect any desirable superstructure.

VIII. *A strong tendency to superficial study*, is a serious obstacle to the greater usefulness of our schools.

With many, a scholar's proficiency is estimated from the number of pages *passed over* or *committed to memory*, rather than from the actual information obtained. More is thought of the repetition of *mere words* than of the acquisition of *ideas*. Parents, too often, measure the teacher's capacity and fitness to instruct, from the number of times their children are required *to perform*,—I can hardly say *recite*,—each day. We can, many of us, remember the time when a teacher's popularity depended, principally, upon the fact, that he heard his pupils read *four times*, daily, though it might be of less real advantage to them, than it would be to a parrot to repeat "*Pretty Poll*," regularly, morning, noon and night ;—for while the parrot may attract attention and procure a subsistence by his loquacious power, the children are in a fair way to forfeit both.

Those teachers, who first attempted an innovation in this particular, must have possessed a great amount of perseverance and independence,—and it would not hazard much to conjecture that they were obliged every succeeding year to seek a new spot whereon to live, with the invaluable privilege of "*boarding round*," and, at the

expiration of their term of service, receive some ten dollars per month "in full of all demands," with the oft-repeated and gratuitous intimations that their new notions were working destruction to themselves and the schools.

We have reason to rejoice that our professional lot has fallen on better times, when a teacher may, if he thinks proper, require his pupils to read but once each day, or even twice each week, without any danger from a parental insurrection. But I intended, more particularly, to speak of the disposition to *simplify* every study. Many of our modern school-books tend to favor this inclination, by attempting to explain too much, and thus leaving the young tyro, but little, if any, inducement or occasion to think for himself, and almost entirely removing the necessity for that mental discipline, which should, as it were, constitute the chief aim and end of all school instruction. If books and teachers do all the thinking for scholars, they will, as a matter of course, do none for themselves.

It may very well answer to facilitate and expedite the movement of physical bodies, as much as possible, but to supply the mind with any foreign propelling power, rather than call into action that contained within itself, will impair its elasticity and efficiency, just in proportion to the amount applied.

The mind should be inured to patient and persevering thought,—should be trained to close and scrutinizing research,—it should, indeed, be made to depend, mainly, upon its own powers and resources, and is but little worth only when thus dependent. We may construct our railroads from city to city, and from state to state, and thus very properly and profitably facilitate intercourse

and trade,—but a railroad to knowledge is about as practicable as a railroad to the moon.

But many of our school-books tend, by a *redundancy* of explanations, rules and solutions, to excuse the mind from all that *reasoning*, *research* and *inquisitiveness*, so essential to its healthful, active and influential existence.

A scholar, for instance, goes over a treatise on Arithmetic, and imagines he understands all about it because he finds the explanations numerous and intelligible. Instead of applying his mind directly and closely to the examples and questions, and, by a thorough *analysis*, ascertaining all their properties, he gives his attention, principally, to the rules and solutions of the book, and “takes it for granted,” that as he understands them he knows everything necessary for him to know.

Let two boys be examined in Arithmetic,—one having used a text book abounding in rules and explanatory notes, and the other nearly the reverse. It will be found that the former has placed his entire dependence upon the rules, and, that consequently he is unable to do anything without the aid of a given rule ;—while the latter having relied, in a degree, upon his own powers, will be much better prepared to explain and solve general questions and problems. The following anecdote will illustrate this position :—

Says a teacher, “A lad of 17 years, once said to me, with an air of much importance, ‘*I went through Daboll’s Arithmetic three times last winter, sir, and I can do any sum in the hardest cipherring book you can bring.*’ I did not dispute him, for I did not doubt that he could, *mechanically*, obtain the answer to almost any question he could find in a book, set down under a specific rule.

But thinking he, like many others, had *made figures without thinking*, I asked him the following question : ‘ *What will 20 lbs. of beef come to at 10 cents per lb., provided two thirds of it is fat ?*’ After a moment of hesitation, he said,—‘ If you will tell me what the *fat* comes to, I will do the sum.’ At this I smiled, and he said, with considerable spirit, ‘ If you will tell me what *rule* it comes under, I will do it.’ I continued silent, for his ludicrous embarrassment prevented my speaking at the instant, when he with great earnestness said, ‘ *It is an unfair sum ; I never saw such a sum in the book in my life.*’ ”

And thus it is with many,—*they do not examine, they do not think* ; they have not yet learned that *thinking* has any connection with education. The unfortunate lad, just alluded to, had never accustomed his mind to seek for *the why and the wherefore*. No, that *two thirds fat* he could not digest,—he could not put it under any rule ;—indeed he had never before seen a question that had any *fat* in it, and he was entirely unacquainted with the process of “ *trying out* ” the fat.

But one might infer, from reading some of our school-book advertisements and recommendations, that a new and improved highway to knowledge had been opened. As many of the quack medicines of the present day are equally well suited to check maladies of every name, in every clime, and propose to effect cures of incurable diseases “ without change of diet or manner of living,”—so these books will answer alike well for all schools and scholars, and will advance with astonishing and equal rapidity and thoroughness, the active and the stupid,—the genius and the dunce,—without any labor on the part

of the teacher or pupil. And these books are scattered throughout the land, and there is reason to fear that they will continue to exist, unless, perchance, the discovery and publication of the method of instruction pursued by some "old Parr" in the good old times of Noah, shall cause a general expurgation !

But against this diluting and simplifying process, so common and so pernicious, I feel constrained to enter my protest. I must not be understood as objecting "*in toto*" to rules and explanations. Some are needed, but there is greater danger from the multiplicity, than from the paucity of them. It is generally better, that directions, when needed, be given by the living teacher, and even by him in such manner as shall draw upon the pupil's own resources, and cause him *to think*. Experience and observation will establish the fact, that those truths and principles in science which are attained by *continued, unaided, persevering* application, are most *clearly, permanently and usefully* fixed upon the mind.

Here we may suggest that the manner of conducting recitations is, too frequently, such as not to elicit much thought. The mere responding to certain stereotyped questions by giving certain stereotyped answers, constitutes but a small part of a good recitation. Yet in many schools the slightest deviation, in word or order, from the questions of the book, will seriously affect a recitation, if not entirely disconcert the class. If teachers would encourage their pupils *to ask*, as well as *answer* questions during a recitation, and state points which are not plain to them, the happiest results would be experienced. The pupil should be taught not to feel satisfied with the mere "*say so*" of the book, unless he sees

"*the why and the wherefore ;*" and he should be urged, with becoming freedom, to make any suitable inquiry or expression of thought pertinent to the passing exercise or recitation. It is well, often, that each member of a class be required to ask some question respecting the lesson, while on the recitation seat. The adoption of this course would, probably, lead to a more careful and thoughtful preparation of lessons, and would induce children to seek for proper expressions wherewith to make known their feelings and queries.

IX. *The early withdrawal of scholars from school, is an injury to the schools.*

It is very frequently the case that children are taken from school at the age of 12 years, and even earlier, and receive very few, if any, opportunities for instruction, subsequently. There are so many branches of industry in which children may be somewhat profitably employed, that an inducement is held out to forsake the paths of science for those of wealth. The temptation presented is, too often, yielded to, and the time which so peculiarly belongs to the schools, is employed on the farm, in the workshop or warehouse. But to every reflecting mind, this must appear an act of great injustice to the pupils, to the schools and to the community. Children who leave school thus early cannot have obtained a thorough elementary knowledge, nor have acquired those correct habits of thought and discipline so desirable for the man of business, or for the good citizen. They are taken from school at the very time they begin, in any adequate manner, to appreciate their privileges, and to comprehend the value of the knowledge they may acquire. The attention of parents and teachers should be

directed to this point, or, ere long, it will be considered almost a *disparagement* for boys and girls to attend school after they have arrived at the age of 12 years, and in some places it is so considered at the present time. But I must leave this subject, hoping that a mere allusion to it may be productive of some good, or at least, secure for it the consideration of some who have not yet given it a thought.

I will now proceed to name some particulars in which the influence of parents is an obstacle to the greater usefulness of public schools.

1. *A neglect on the part of parents to visit, occasionally, the schools to which they send their children.*

Parents and teachers are engaged in one and the same cause, and should labor with perfect understanding, good feeling and harmony. But how often are the good impressions of the school-room worse than obliterated or counteracted by the scenes and influences of the fireside! Many parents consider their own responsibility fully met when they have provided a school-room, employed an instructor and sent their children to school. Indispensable, as these certainly are, they by no means cover the whole ground of duty. Children are often sent to school month after month, and season after season, without being once cheered by the visit of a parent. This ought not so to be. If parents would make it an object to spend an hour, occasionally, in the school-room, they would not only find their own interest increasing, but they would cause a much greater interest and consequent improvement in their children. It is a mistake, no less injurious than common, that school laws and school committees relieve parents from all care and responsibility in

the education of their children. This should be corrected. Teachers, committees and parents have each highly responsible, though somewhat different duties to perform, and yet they all have, or should have, the same general end in view ;—each having peculiar duties, yet each, in a measure, dependent upon the others. If the peculiar and appropriate duties of either are neglected, or but partially performed, the whole must suffer. The cheerful and hearty co-operation of parents is as essential to the best good of a school, as are the dew, the rain and the sunshine to the growth of the vegetable kingdom. The want of the former will as surely tend to cause an intellectual dearth as will that of the latter literal famine.

A school-house may be constructed in the best and most approved style;—a competent teacher may be furnished, whose efforts for the good of the school may be vigorous, well-timed and unceasing;—children may be thoroughly supplied with books and sent to school with constancy, and yet much will be wanting to give success and vitality, if a feeling of cold indifference exists on the part of parents and guardians. It is, comparatively, an easy matter to cause children to come together within the walls of a school-room, but to excite and keep alive an active, healthful and uniform interest in the studies and exercises of the school, requires the combined wisdom and hearty co-operation of parents and teachers. Instructors need generous support and encouragement, and children need and should receive, the influence and assistance of interested and sympathizing parents.

We fear that very few properly consider the *duties* and *trials* and *perplexities*, of the faithful and devoted

teacher. How often do parents, who have but two or three children, exclaim, "How glad I shall be when the school begins!" Yet parents will send their children "by the dozen," to school, and never enter themselves, nor bestow a sympathizing thought upon the poor teacher, who, "himself against a host," is obliged to control and instruct the collected "dozens" of the district.

An instructor has, as it were, a large family to manage, composed of many smaller families, differing in *disposition*, *talents* and *attainments*,—subjected, perhaps, to as many different kinds of home-discipline as are the homes numerous from which they come. These he must govern, classify and instruct, having regard to the greatest general good. The idle and indifferent he must arouse and urge onward,—the diffident and distrustful he must encourage by persevering kindness and gentleness,—the more forward, perhaps, need a check,—many require oft-repeated *direction* and *correction*, and sometimes a strong external application of the "lignum vitæ" may seem absolutely indispensable. To the last named, however, we think resort is too often made, and we doubt not that a good degree of interest on the part of parents, in particulars which we *have* named and which we *may* name, would almost entirely relieve teachers from the, oftentimes, painful necessity of inflicting corporal punishment. If parents and teachers would exercise a little more caution and *say only what they mean, and mean just what they say, and manifest a firm, decided, unyielding, though kind* determination to have every requirement *strictly* regarded and *implicitly* answered, an immense amount of trouble might be prevented.

Oft-repeated and continued scolding and whipping in a

family or school, will only tend to make *bad* children *worse*, and *good* children *indifferent*.

A blacksmith brought up his son, to whom he was very severe, to his own trade. One day the old Vulcan was attempting to harden a cold chisel, which he had made of foreign steel, but could not succeed. At last the youth, who was standing near, willing to impart knowledge which he had obtained by bitter experience, exclaimed, with an expression full of faith, "Horsewhip it, father, if that won't harden it nothing will." That boys are susceptible of this *hardening* process admits of far less doubt than does the case of the chisel.

On the question of corporal punishment I would not be misunderstood. I am free to confess that I think the rod has been *too frequently* used, but I am also free to express my belief that the day has not yet arrived in which the highest good of the schools demands that its use shall be wholly and universally abandoned and prohibited. When that happy day will dawn I cannot predict; but I am certain, if it *ever* dawns, it will be hailed with as much joy by teachers as by any other class of citizens. But with the present condition of society, and under existing circumstances, there are cases in which the good of a school, and the good of the offender against salutary regulations, demand a severe application of the rod. Some teachers may use it *too freely, and too frequently*. In our attempt to prevent this, let us not rush to an opposite and equally pernicious extreme.

I would say that the rod should never be used hastily, nor passionately. There *are* teachers and there *are* parents, who, for every slight offence or deviation of a child,

fly, as it were, to the rod, and with passionate violence apply it. This is certainly wrong, and should be dis-
countenanced. The rod should not be applied on every
occasion, nor for every offence, but the infrequency of
its use should contribute, in no small degree, to its effi-
cacy. When resorted to it should be done with calm
determination, and the whole case should be so repre-
sented and explained, with all its attendant circumstances,
that the school, and the offender himself, shall see and
feel that the teacher is about to perform an unpleasant and
painful *duty*,—a duty, from which he shall never shrink
when called upon by circumstances to act. After suita-
ble comment upon the nature and particulars of the case,
the rod should be applied with such a degree of severity
as shall be necessary *to subdue* the guilty one and strongly
impress *upon him*, and *through him* upon the school, that
“*The way of the transgressor is,*” and always will be,
“*hard.*” This course, followed by a kindness on the
part of the teacher which shall convince that nought has
been done “in malice,” will, almost invariably, produce
the desired result.

Good order and submission to wholesome regulations
must be insisted on in every well managed school and
family. These should be secured by mild and kind
means, if possible, but should not, in any instance, be
sacrificed to a frequently conceived and advanced, though
I think *erroneous* opinion, that the use of the rod is *too*
brutal. If boys so far depart from a proper course as to
allow *brutal passions* to gain the mastery, and under their
control “set at nought” all good requirements and salu-
tary laws, they should be met and conquered by such

arguments as the existing and ruling motives may seem to demand.

I have thus enlarged on this question, because I feel that the very *opposition* of those who object to the use of the rod *at any time, or under any circumstances*, is in itself a serious obstacle to the best good of the school.

2. *The neglect of parents to secure the constant attendance of their children.* This is one of the greatest obstacles against which our schools have to contend. When a boy goes to learn a trade, or enters a store, it is expected, *as a matter of course*, that he will always be "at his post," and sickness is almost the only satisfactory reason for a day's absence. Nor does any one consider this hard, or unreasonable. But attendance at school, is often viewed in a very different light. It is not unfrequently the case that boys and girls are sent to school when they have nothing else to do. The school is regarded as a convenient place in which to keep children "out of the way." They are consequently sent one day and kept away the next, as convenience or circumstances may make it desirable, and not as the real good of the children demands.

Now a very little reflection must convince any one that such a course is extremely unwise and wrong. Not only the absentee, but his class, and even the whole school of which he is a member, suffer from this course. A pupil who is often absent, cannot, with spirit or interest, engage in his studies when present. His class-mates are in advance of him and the attractive chain is broken. If called upon to recite, he is unprepared, and, by his disconnected and lifeless answers, he becomes a *clog* to the whole class. Yet is it not true that most complaints against teachers for incompetency proceed from the parents of

such children ? Teachers *are incompetent* to impart any new light to such comet-like pupils ;—comet-like in some respect, but most unlike in others ;—they appear and disappear, but when and how they will re-appear, no mortal can conjecture !

Parents should know that the best of teachers cannot advance their children unless they are regular and constant in their attendance. There are cases, I admit, in which the absence of pupils is almost absolutely necessary, but such instances are extremely rare. Let all parents make the same effort to secure the constant attendance of their children at school, as do some to secure their attendance at some dancing school, and we feel assured that neither heat nor cold, rain nor snow, party nor pleasure excursions would operate to make so many vacant seats in our schools. In regard to attendance upon schools for instruction in some of the mere accomplishments of life, parents should not be more particular than in regard to those of a more practical and useful nature.

I was about to speak of *unseasonable* attendance and the habit of leaving school before the regular hour for dismissal, but the consequences, in kind so nearly resemble those of the evil we have just considered, that I shall not enlarge, but will merely suggest that many of the habits and evils proceeding from a want of regularity and punctuality through all the business of life *may*, and often *do*, have their origin, directly or indirectly, in the evils we have alluded to. If so, with what earnestness should we endeavor to arouse parents and all concerned to a proper consideration of the subject !

3. *The habit, with many parents, of listening to and believing all the complaints of their children and censuring*

the instructor in their presence, tends greatly to impair the teacher's influence and to diminish the usefulness of the school.

Here I would not be understood to say that teachers always adopt a course above censure, or that they *always* do things in the best or most prudent manner. They are but men, with the infirmities of men, and are liable to err. But in the formation and execution of their plans, they must be allowed to pursue their own course, nor should they be expected to coincide with the views and wishes of all. This would be impossible, as there are widely differing views among their patrons.

Parents are often guilty, unconsciously I doubt not, of causing much injury to schools by manifesting an interest in all the little antipathies which their children may have contracted, and by sympathizing with them in all the little wrongs, real or imaginary, to which they have been subjected.

Probably there is no individual, whose motives and actions are so often and so grossly misconceived and misrepresented, as are those of the school teacher. This, we may readily see, arises from the very nature of his employment. He has to do with the mind and passions in all their various *workings*, and that at an age when reason and prudence have but a very limited sway. As his pupils differ in disposition and understanding, so his efforts to secure order and obedience, and his incentives to exertion, must vary. To one a mere look, or word of reproof, will be as effectual as the most severe discipline to another; and yet is not the faithful, prudent and skilful teacher sometimes severely censured, and accused of partiality, while endeavoring to adapt his mode of disci-

pline to the peculiar disposition and temperament of the offender ?

A conscientious and wise instructor will consider it an important part of his duty, so to study the character and peculiar disposition of each pupil, as shall enable him to pursue that course of discipline which shall most readily and effectually secure the reform or best good of every one. But from the want of proper consideration on the part of many parents and guardians this becomes a fruitful source of complaint and fault-finding.

A teacher may pursue that course which experience and observation dictate as the best, and which an interest in the welfare and improvement of his pupils prompts him to pursue, and while thus acting and thus influenced by the purest motives, he is perhaps represented by one as being *too severe*, by another *too lax*, and by many as *partial* in his discipline ; *this* parent complains that *his* children have not studies enough, and *that* because *his* has too many. And whence comes all this complaint with parents ? Does it proceed from frequent visits to the school-room and from actual observation while there ? By no means, but from the distorted statements of interested and *ex-parte* witnesses,—the pupils themselves,—and many a poor teacher is *tried*, *found guilty*, *condemned* and almost *executed*, without being afforded the least opportunity for self-defence,—and perchance, being all the while unconscious of the crimes or deviations for which he is under sentence.

But, says one, shall parents always submit to what the teacher does ? Is he always in the right and children in the wrong ? Certainly not : the teacher is not infallible ; but does he not, or ought he not best to understand his

own business? At all events, will it always answer to rely on the pupil's *judgment*? Will he not often be influenced by motives similar to those of the lad, who, when asked by his instructor, in what way he should prefer to be punished, replied with much readiness, "*If you please, sir, according to the Italian system of penmanship, heavy strokes up, down ones light.*"

If parents really feel that the teacher has erred, and their children have been injured or neglected, would it not be better to go directly to him, and with a spirit of candor and kindness, make known their feelings? Possibly they have not been rightfully informed, or perhaps, a false coloring has been given, or some circumstances withheld, and upon hearing the *whole* story, they may become fully satisfied that no injustice or wrong has been intended or committed. In most cases such would undoubtedly be the result.

I do not intend to assert that most children *design* to make false statements, but they are so easily biassed and prejudiced, that they very frequently imagine many things which exist only in imagination. A *wrong word*, an *improper emphasis*, a *slight omission or addition*, or even an *altered look or tone*, often very materially affect an account.

Parents, probably, are not always aware of the nature and extent of their influence, directly and indirectly, upon their children, who are prone to like or dislike what their parents like or dislike, and endeavor to express the same sentiments that they hear expressed at the fireside, though not always correctly. Few realize how many notions and prejudices children form under the influence of those with whom they spend most of their time.

A child being asked by her Sabbath school teacher "Who killed Abel?" promptly answered "Gen. Jackson!" In one of those periods of high political excitement, (the influence of which cannot be otherwise than deleterious upon the young) she had heard so much said against the General, that she thought, as a matter of course, that he was a *general murderer*, and the only man bad enough to commit the *first homicide*!

4. *The unreasonable, or extravagant expectations, and consequent disappointment of parents*, sometimes produce an apathy, if not feelings of positive opposition towards the school.

Every parent wishes *his* children to be *first rate* scholars, and if they do not become such, the entire blame is cast upon the poor teacher, without, in the least, considering how far circumstances may justify this. Now it is sometimes the case that a boy may attend school month after month and receive every possible attention from his instructor, and yet make but little, if any, perceptible progress. It does not necessarily follow that the teacher is unfaithful, or incompetent. The best of teachers cannot make *first rate* scholars from *third* or *fourth rate* stock. To make a good house it is not only necessary to have good stock, but also to have that stock entirely at the disposal of a skillful workman. And so with the making of good scholars,—the teacher must have good material and the general management of that material. But it frequently happens that a boy of very ordinary abilities, and those blunted and stunted by neglect, or mismanagement in his physical training, is sent to school *occasionally*, and if he does not learn rapidly and make a "right smart"

scholar, it is entirely owing to the unfaithfulness or inefficiency of the instructor! But it should be known that no mortal influence can cause such children to improve under such circumstances, or create life or replenish the strength for a boy whose entire energies and vigor have been tasked to their utmost in counteracting the indulgence of an excessive appetite or the gross abuse of his physical nature in any way.

5. *The want of co-operation on the part of parents and teachers to secure correct habits of action and expression out of school*, tends to impair the usefulness of schools. Improper habits or indulgences allowed, directly or tacitly, away from the school-room, will in some manner develop themselves in school, and that unfavorably to the good of the school. The moral character and finer feelings of the heart require much attention and cultivation. Children should be induced to realize their dependence upon their Creator and their unceasing obligations to Him for all the blessings and privileges they enjoy. They should be taught to respect the aged, to love and obey their parents and teachers, and to treat all with becoming civility and merited respect. They should be aided to cherish a kind and conciliating spirit, a strong regard for truth and purity of thought and utterance, and a sincere desire to know and perform certain duties to their Creator, to their parents and teachers, and to all with whom they may associate. Parents and teachers should in every suitable manner labor to form in children a high and elevated tone of moral feeling and worth,—an abhorrence for all that is unbecoming and grovelling in its nature and tendencies, and a deep and strong love for every thing that is “lovely

and of good report." The whole subject rests with parents and teachers, and is it not worth their hearty, untiring and united efforts ?

But I have already said too much, perhaps, of parental co-operation. Its great importance must be my only apology. If any parties should labor with "united heart and hand," surely parents and teachers should so do. Their one object and aim should be so to train up and instruct children that they shall become useful, intelligent and moral members of society. The deplorable effects of complaint and fault-finding, so common in some communities, should never reach the teacher unless on ground of the strongest reason ; for how often, like an iceberg, do they chill his ardor, and literally freeze up all his kindest emotions ! He needs sympathy and encouragement, and with them properly and seasonably bestowed, if he possesses manly feelings and a noble heart, he will almost be strengthened to outdo himself. It has been said with much truth, *that as is the teacher so will be the school*. It may with equal truth be said, *that as are the parents so will be the teacher*. Generous, active, interested, intelligent and sympathizing parents will exert a most powerful and happy influence upon the instructor of their children,—while sordid, ignorant, negligent and fault-finding parents will almost paralyze the energies of the best teachers, and render well-directed, and otherwise successful efforts, powerless. How important, then, that parents become acquainted with the teacher and friend of their children ! How important, that with all diligence they strive so to govern themselves in "very word and deed" as shall beget in their children a feeling of confidence *in* and respect *for* their teacher !

But I have detained you too long. A subject of such vital interest to the welfare and prosperity of our schools, presents so many points worthy of serious consideration, that it is hard to know *how* and *where* to begin, and still harder *how* and *where* to end. I believe, as I have previously intimated, that our free school system is *the system* for our country, and that its unobstructed operation will produce the happiest and most satisfactory results. Let us, then, strive to cherish it, and labor diligently for the removal of all obstacles to its perfect success.

Most will assent to the truth and importance of many points to which I have, thus imperfectly, alluded, and will readily ask what shall be done to remedy or remove the evils. In answer to such an inquiry, I would say that most of these evils proceed from a thoughtlessness or want of consideration, and the only way to secure their removal, is to present them to the view of those concerned until an active interest shall be excited against them. Teachers, and others who possess an interest in the subject, must be the willing pioneers in the work of improvement. Teachers, especially, must be active. They from the very position they occupy, see and feel the operation of the evils named, as none but teachers can; let them never cease to talk and labor and write, until others shall be aroused to a proper examination of the whole matter.

I would suggest, as a very good way for creating a proper feeling, that teachers invite their patrons,—the parents and guardians of their pupils,—to assemble at the school-room, and in a plain, familiar lecture, present to their consideration existing evils and obstacles. Who

can estimate the amount of good that may be done in towns during a winter, by occasional meetings, at which a lecture, followed by familiar discussion, shall constitute the exercises of the evening? Would not this course, more than any other, bring the whole subject home to those concerned, and awaken a common and general interest?

In conclusion, I would urge my professional brethren well to consider the high and responsible nature of the duties devolving upon them. To us, my friends, in a peculiar sense, is entrusted the duty of determining the character and influence of those who will soon act important parts on the busy stage of life. To our charge and training are committed the tender and pliable minds of childhood, and upon our efforts and influence depends much of their future character. Fidelity on our part may lead them on to spheres of usefulness and happiness, or our neglect may cast them upon society enemies alike to wholesome regulations and useful employment. "What manner of men," then, ought we to be, from whom children receive so much of their moral and intellectual training? Surely we are engaged in a great and noble work,—a work which demands all the wisdom, the prudence, the devotion and the energy, which it is possible for man to possess. It behoves us to labor "with all diligence," and search out and remove all obstacles to our complete success; and, though, when we look upon the immortal minds under our care, and consider that every word, and look, and action of our every day life, may tell for weal or woe in a risen generation, our spirits may well nigh fail, and poor humanity exclaim

"Who is sufficient for this work?"—still let us press onward and upward, putting our trust in our God and the children's God, ever praying and laboring that we may be the humble instruments of preparing minds for a high and manly sphere of useful influence in this world ; and that we may sow such seeds, only, as shall spring up and flourish in perennial bloom and beauty beyond the shores of time.



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